Introductory Lecture

[ca. 1854?]

Gentlemen: —

It was upon a less calm, ~~[illegible]~~ if possibly, in some aspects, ~~[illegible]~~ a more ~~interesting~~ momentous occasion, — that the voice of an ~~ancient~~ atherian orator rang out once upon the ~~Athenian~~ Agora; — "~~H, Boeteo~~" — "What would you, — Men of Athens, — asking of one another to day, — is any new thing said? Is Philip dead?" — "No;" — was the reply, — "but if he were, it matters little; other foes as great would soon arise, still to distract you!" — And, although we have no one ~~foe~~ enemy, like the Men of Macedon, — against whom we ~~[illegible]~~ here meet ~~assembled~~ ~~[illegible]~~ — ~~[illegible]~~ to deliberate and contend, — yet we too have our ~~foes~~ foes, — whose name is Legion; — and whose power we can never cease to oppose. For, — besides ~~our~~ the Physician's natural and legitimate opponents, — Pain, — Infirmity, and Death, which stalk, upon the wings of the Cholera or the Fever fiend,

over the earth, — ~~through the land~~, — there are ever also, as more ungenerous and far less honorable combatants, — those venomous Hydra-heads, Empiricism, — Imposture, & Medical delusion. These may we well wish, — as did Caligula of his Roman subjects, — but wish in vain, — that they had but one neck, — that we might sever them all at a single blow. It is in vain to hope it. Ours is a warfare unrelenting and perpetual.

~~Let us then prepare to meet it.~~ Within these walls, I welcome you, to prepare yourselves earnestly and deliberately for this conflict: not as those who rashly fling themselves without sword or shield upon the field of cunning adversaries, however low, — but, as those who would forge their own armor, pour deep-dug mines, —, and never cease to burnish it until by its very brightness it shall affect the opposing front, — and, by its power and keenness, bring you conquest.

How do we stand, then, — if of this battle we would count the cost, — what is our position, who, as physicians, cry aloud against the evil

of Quackery & Medical Delusion? What is our power & place? Are physicians, as the superstition of 300 years ago would have held us to be, — like the 12 miracle-working Hebrews, — going about ever to do marvellous good, — giving sight to the blind, — ears to the deaf, — and opening almost the very graves to give up their dead? — Or, are we more, like the juggling Brahmins or Dervises of the East, — a priest-hood of Imposture? — Arch-quacks, contemning quackery? — Or, yet again, — is our place merely held by courtesy and of form; — useless and really superfluous in fact? Does the ~~physician~~ doctor merely wait upon his patient as the undertaker ~~does~~ upon the corpse, — a sort of escort, — to see that life wears out with a due decorum? — Is the obstetrician but a pretentious nurse; — the surgeon's knife no more than a butchering implement; — calomel a legalized

poison, and cod-liver oil extreme unction, for those appointed to die?

Gentlemen, – if you could answer either of these questions in the affirmative, – I would advise you to give up the study of your profession. – But they can neither of them be so answered. The gift of healing is no longer a miraculous gift: nor is it so, now, ever believed to be. The superstitious days of Medicine are over. The sceptical era has succeeded; and, like every other scepticism, this has become the most fertile ground for every kind of credulity, of a different sort: for quackery! Yet, legitimate Medicine is in no sense an imposture. If it pretended to much in the old days, – and aimed at more, it was in an honest spirit; it believed in its own aspirations, – and hoped its own apotheosis: and, now, it pretends to but little.

If there be any one charge which its adversaries can push with the most force in view of the dissipation of ancient faith in infallible Medicine, – it is that of its real insufficiency; – incompleteness; – uncertainty.

We must bow to this charge. It is too true. Is it worth our while to blind our eyes to the reality, however painful and humbling, — and to go on worshipping a weak idol that may presently fall, like Dagon, at our feet? Such an idol would be, a false estimate of the power and resources of our art, — a superstitious exaggeration of its prerogative.

But, ~~gentlemen~~, — this prerogative is still a noble one. Perhaps its noblest attribute may be its hope: yet, even as it is, — Medicine is a high art; — a true Science; — a most honorable profession. As it is the duty which has devolved upon me in the course we are now ~~[illegible]~~ entering, — so far as my humble efforts can reach, to demonstrate the ground of its claims to the rank of a Science, — and to establish the principles upon which that Science is founded, — I will not pursue that task now.

Let me however remind you — as instances & evidences of the advance which

Scientific Medicine has made within the past century, — merely, — of the introduction of Vaccination: of Auscultation & Percussion in the Diagnosis of disease: of the often-abused but yet important Statistical or Numerical method of accumulating medical facts, — of Louis: of Etherization: and of the only now commencing investigations into the condition of minute parts, solid and liquid, of the body, in health and disease, — by Chemical means, — and by the microscope. Upon this side of the ocean, where we are too apt to rely mainly upon the labors of authorities in the old world upon matters of Science, no more noble monument of a truly scientific effort has as yet been raised, — than the grand work of the late lamented Dr Drake of Ohio, — upon the Diseases and Causes of Disease in the Great American Valley: in which a most elaborate series of observations and accumulated facts is recorded, — bearing upon the whole history of local, sporadic & epidemic diseases over a wide region of our country; — and tending to establish doctrines with regard to them, upon a firm basis of induction analogous to that of the Physical Sciences. All honor to such men and to such labors

It is my view of the department of study which it is the care of a Lecturer upon the Institutes to open before the Student's approach, — that it should not only embrace the consideration of the laws of human organization and life, complete in health, and deranged in disease, — but also, if possible, of those of the external elements and forces, into constant relation with which we are brought by the very conditions of our existence.

What a vast field of labor have we thus presented! Our place is, — not to attempt, rashly and blindly, — to gather into one garner all the glowing harvest of even a single acre of its extent, — but to lead you forward upon it, — instructing you in use of the tools & method of study, — to ~~sow~~ plough, sow, reap and gather for yourselves. This, only, can we do; this only is it wise for us to undertake. The curriculum of a Medical School is but a Synopsis of the course of study which every medical man should pursue, to fit him for the responsible vocation of his art; a course of study which should end but with his life.